
Archiviolithic: The Anthropocene and the Hetero-Archive

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Abstract

This essay explores three deconstructive concepts—archive, anthropocene, and auto-affection—across two registers. The first is the register of what counts as readability in general, beyond reading in its narrow and actualized sense. (This would include the reading of non-linguistic systems and traces, including the stratigraphic reading of the planet earth’s sedimented layers of time that are archived in the geological record, and the reading of human monuments ranging from books to buildings). The second register applies to Derrida today, and what it means to read the corpus of a philosopher and how that corpus is governed by (and governs) proper names. I want to suggest that the way we approach proper names in philosophy and theory is part of a broader problem of our relation to what it is to read, and how readability intertwines with the human.

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I. Reading what Remains

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the planet earth's sedimented layers of time that are archived in the geological record, and the reading of human monuments ranging from books to buildings.) The second register applies to Derrida today, and what it means to read the corpus of a philosopher and how that corpus is governed by (and governs) proper names. I want to suggest that the way we approach proper names in philosophy and theory is part of a broader problem of our relation to what it is to read, and how readability intertwines with the human. There is a certain unreadability to proper names, insofar as proper names designate distinct individuals rather than a repeatable sense that carries across time and contexts; one side of a proper name marks a repeatable *sense*, so that 'Shakespeare' would refer to the author of *Hamlet*, the individual at the basis of Stratford-Upon-Avon's tourist industry, and the central character of *Shakespeare in Love*. But as a proper name, 'Shakespeare' refers to a concrete individual who would still be Shakespeare even if he did not author *Hamlet*, even if he happened to be born in Scotland rather than England, and even if his life were in no way similar to any of the events that have become the subject of literary and cultural history. 'Shakespeare' as proper name would not coincide with the sense of 'Shakespeare'; the former would not have a readable sense, and would only be Shakespeare because he was so named, whereas the latter operates as a cultural monument.¹

This double force that conditions the proper name extends beyond the names of individuals and marks a problem of history and the archive; every term in history possesses two sides: the circulating sense that would be repeatable and open to ongoing contestation, and a certain 'mark' that would be singular and would designate a concrete event and nothing more. Thus we could argue about the *sense* of 9/11 (war on terror, Bush era, threshold of terrorist awareness, media event, cultural marker of a new sense of the Middle East, opening of a state of exception) but this would be quite different from the date, the simple marking on a calendar in which we inscribe historical time. The first sense is conceptual while the second operates as a name, as an ostensive 'this.'

A certain degree of unreadability that accompanies the proper name also marks humanity's archiving of itself, and philosophical modes of archiving in general. ('Derrida' acts as a proper name attached to a series of philosophical contexts and narratives and is, in that regard, not a purely proper name. One side of the proper name opens out to a terrain of concepts, while another side attaches to an individual with a personal history that is distinct from the broader project of concepts, sense and understanding). Humanity, too, is composed of concrete individuals with singular, unrecorded and 'unhistoric acts' but 'humanity' is also

a name that enables an ongoing self-understanding—acting as a form of archive or monument through time. We might say that there would be the species of humans, and then the self-archiving sense of humanity. One of the many ways of reading Alain Badiou's work would be to say that he does not see these two as overlapping sets or as numerically equivalent; political events would reconfigure 'humanity' allowing for more humans of the species to count as human (Badiou 2011, 44). Reading, especially in terms of proper names, at once orients sense towards specific concrete individuals existing within time, and also to a sense that carries beyond the individual across time. One might say that the task of a philosopher is to render her proper name improper: to have the proper name refer beyond the individual to a broader sense. And one might then say that the task of humanity today might be to think of 'human' less as the name of an actual species (the extensive set that collects all human bodies), and more as a proper name transformed into a sense: to what extent has humanity created itself as something *to be read*? And how is this readability scarred by unreadability, or all the ways in which human monuments and archives threaten to fall back into so much singular, non-circulating and contingent scarring?

Consider the famous scene in Franklin J. Schaffner's *The Planet of the Apes* (1968) where Taylor (played by Charlton Heston) discovers the wreckage of the statue of liberty, now existing as so much junk for a planet of 'baboons' incapable of reading its sense. This monument (and all monuments of its kind) possessed a certain sense, and enabled humanity to read from the past into the future, imagining itself as a tradition of meaning. (Similarly, every book and text in the world's archive composes humanity's self-constitution, allowing something like 'humanity' to be more than the designation of a species). However, as the thought experiment of *The Planet of the Apes* indicates, the very archive that constitutes humanity as an ideal sense, is also a concrete, fragile, finite, limited and potentially senseless assemblage of detritus. We might ask: just as we can imagine a time when the Statue of Liberty might lie in the sand as so much unrecognized wreckage, so might the grand archive of human thought remain as mere stuff in a planet no longer blessed with readers. This would be the reverse of what Derrida suggested we imagine in 'Not Apocalypse, Not Now' (1984): for Derrida the material support or archive of letters might be destroyed, removing the possibility of the survival of the history of sense. Even if sense were not reducible to the material archive, it could not survive in the absence of material support. It is also the case that the archive could remain, materially, but that its conditions for sense destroyed. (In some ways this condition

is already being approached today: the twenty-first century may be the beginning of an epoch in which texts exist in the material form alone, but are no longer accompanied by readers). What if, centuries from now, another species were to discover the human archive but not be blessed with human language? Similarly, we might ask, if humanity composes itself as an archive that always bears the possibility of being nothing more than senseless waste, how does each philosopher memorialize his own archive and how does he ward off the potential for his work to be abandoned, like the statue of Liberty lying outside its original conditions of memorialization? Thus, there are two registers: the reading of texts and the register of possible readability in general.

In the background of these two registers, is the problem of an author's or corpus's apparent death: what happens when a body of work lies as so much silent, dead and unread waste, and how do we account for this becoming-unreadable? All the resources for approaching such a question are given in Derrida's early work on Husserl and the problem of the history of sense: in order for a body of work to be sustained through time it must be inscribed or incarnated in some concrete, repeatable form that would also transcend the specific context of its emergence:

The possibility or necessity of being incarnated in a graphic sign is no longer simply extrinsic and factual in comparison with ideal Objectivity: it is the *sine qua non* condition of Objectivity's internal completion. As long as ideal Objectivity is not, or rather, *can* not be engraved in the world—as—long as ideal Objectivity is not in a position to be party to an incarnation (which, in the purity of its sense, is more than a system of signals [*signalisation*] or an outer garment)—then ideal Objectivity is not fully constituted. (Derrida 1989, 89)

The same incarnation that enables the transmission of sense nevertheless exposes the text to becoming nothing more than its own specific body, becoming nothing more than a name, marking what simply is, and not something that can be reanimated. Take a term such as 'deconstruction,' which today has a continuing sense primarily because it no longer names the signed works of Derrida (or de Man and others) but has come to mean a general process of critique; the term survives, and survives the corpus of Derrida, only by being detached from its original sense. By contrast, take a term such as *différance*, inscribed by Derrida to capture a unique sense that would be quite distinct from Hegelian or structuralist 'difference'; as long as one reads Derrida's work carefully and keeps deconstruction alive the word is readable. But if one were to encounter the word as such it would just as likely appear to be a

typographical error or inscriptive nonsense. Expand this: as long as one keeps reading Derrida his work is more than a proper name, but imagine that we have no training in twentieth-century thought and encounter *Glas*. The work might appear to be nothing more than marks on the page. The readability of a philosopher requires a series of conditions, enabled by the incarnation of a corpus; such conditions and a general milieu of philosophical personae ensure that we can all continue to read Derrida after his bodily death. But those same conditions also enable the incarnated work to become nothing more than an archive of dead letters, for the more a work circulates the higher its chance of falling into a series of unfaithful or simply blind mis-readings. I would suggest that we are approaching such a condition today, when Derrida might become unreadable, just as the human species might be beginning to sense that it too—with all its monuments and histories of sense—might one day be perceived as nothing more than a geological scar.

For quite some time now there has been something like a perceived shift away from Derrida and all that he stands for: ‘Derrida’ marks not only a concrete individual but also a certain theoretical limit, a supposed enclosure within text that ‘we’ today have thankfully overcome. Such uses of Derrida as a concrete marker range from the journalistic claim that Derrida is a postmodern relativist to reactive claims that Derrida plays fast and loose with reason and science (Meynell 1996; Boyd 2006; Ellis 2006). More recently, and more significantly, there has been an avowedly anti-nihilist move towards what proclaims itself as speculative realism. Beginning with Badiou’s radical claim that without the event of truth which breaks into any constituted system we have not attained the condition of the subject, to Quentin Meillassoux’s insistence that we can and must go beyond thought’s conditions to approach the thought of radical and inhuman contingency, we might say that if Derrida had not existed we would have to invent him, as he would enable us to mark our enclosure within reading:

Finally we have what can be called the postmodern orientation ... It is without doubt the most active in France, and includes thinkers as different as Jacques Derrida and Jean-Francois Lyotard...

...the postmodern orientation holds the aim of philosophy to be the deconstruction of the accepted facts of our modernity. In particular postmodern philosophy proposes to dissolve the great constructions of the nineteenth century to which we remain captive—the idea of the historical subject, the idea of progress, the idea of revolution, the idea of humanity and the ideal of science. Its aim is to show that these great constructions are outdated, that we live in the multiple, that there are no great epics of history

or of thought; that there is an irreducible plurality of registers and languages in thought as in action; registers so diverse and heterogeneous that no great idea can totalize or reconcile them. At base, the objective of postmodern philosophy is to deconstruct the idea of totality – to the extent that philosophy find itself destabilized. Consequently, the postmodern orientation activates what might be called mixed practices, de-totalized practices, or impure thinking practices. It situates thought on the outskirts, in areas that cannot be circumscribed. In particular it installs philosophy at the periphery of art, and proposes an untotizable mixture of the conceptual method of philosophy and the sense-oriented enterprise of art. (Badiou 2005, 31–33)

Following Badiou and Meillassoux, and the broader ‘turn’ of speculative realism, there has been a certain sacrifice of one notion of reading; the notion that one must read through a text towards a receding sense that is necessarily deferred: ‘what we have just claimed is that thought is capable of discriminating between those properties of the world which are a function of our relation to it, and those properties of the world as it is in itself’ (Meillassoux 2010, 3). Meillassoux and the movement towards things, objects, machines, vibrant matter and the real refuse what Meillassoux summarizes as post-Kantian correlationism: that we only know the world as it is given to us, only in its meaning. This refusal of the limits of critique has, in turn, amounted to a sacrifice, erasure or non-reading of Derrida who, as a proper name, stands for a certain craven commitment to reading when what presents itself as most urgent is a direct intuition of the real. Here is the premise: if deconstruction in its Derridean mode was an attention to mediating conditions and an ongoing labour of reading (with writing, tracing, text, *écriture* and so on being ways of indicating differential conditions through which life is given) then it follows that one could and should embark upon a speculative realism beyond the deconstructive project:

It has long been commonplace within continental philosophy to focus on discourse, text, culture, consciousness, power, or ideas as what constitutes reality. But despite the vaunted anti-humanism of many of the thinkers identified with these trends, what they give us is less a critique of humanity’s place in the world, than a less sweeping critique of the self-enclosed Cartesian subject. Humanity remains at the centre of these works, and reality appears in philosophy only as the correlate of human thought. In this respect phenomenology, deconstruction, and postmodernism have all been perfect exemplars of the anti-realist trend in continental philosophy. Without deriding the significant contributions of these philosophies, something is clearly amiss in these trends. In the face of the looming ecological catastrophe, and the increasing infiltration of technology into the everyday world

(including our own bodies), it is not clear that the anti-realist tradition is equipped to face up to these developments. The danger is that the dominant anti-realist strain of continental philosophy has not only reached a point of decreasing returns, but that it now actively limits the capacities of philosophy of our time. (Bryant, Srnicek and Harman 2011, 3)

On such speculative realist terms we would think of the productions of relations, differences and systems beyond writing. We could also begin to consider a more general readability in which relations among various inhuman forces would operate beyond any notions of distanced, hermeneutic or readerly deferrals of sense: we would say that ‘reading’ might include the ways in which a plant responds to the sun’s light, or that the human heart’s rate of beating ‘reads’ the body’s hormonal shifts, *or* we might say that there are constitutive relations that are not those of reading. Either way, one would have abandoned the phenomenological tradition of defining *what is* as a ‘world’ that would necessarily be given through sense and horizons of meaning. We would instead proceed directly to objects, things, matter, ecology, relations, machines or the real. The relatively new and self-proclaimed movement of speculative realism can itself be read as a correction of an overly textual or mediated era of theory. Speculative realism would indeed be salutary, and almost necessitated by the development of deconstruction, especially if the latter became increasingly ethical by focusing on the power of concepts. I would suggest, though, that the problem of speculative realism – or the sublime ‘bet’ that we might be able to think the absence of sense – was already a potentiality in Derrida’s corpus, but one that Derrida in archiving himself, and in forming his own proper name warded off in advance. That is, Derrida did not simply produce texts to be sent into the future, he also deployed a series of memorializing or archiving strategies that would allow those texts to be organized and read in a certain manner. This is clear both in his early work on Husserl, where he regards a certain rogue potential in Husserl’s corpus as offering the seeds of a deconstruction that will open up *another* history of philosophy that would attend to all the forces that resist comprehension, sense and survival, and in Derrida’s later work on Nancy, in which the problem of sense and tradition is itself repeated and re-archived. Derrida initially read Husserl in a double sense: phenomenology is at once concerned with a truth and meaning that remains the same through time and can be re-activated beyond any of its specific incarnations (a sense and truth of philosophy independent of proper names), but phenomenology is also concerned with the singularity of texts (that there must have

been ‘a’ Euclid who would concretize the law of geometry and would preclude the notion of a realm of pure truth existing in some ‘third realm’ beyond history and writing). By the time Derrida addresses the question of sense—and turns back to Husserl—by way of his book on Jean-Luc Nancy, things have changed: the problem of a sense of the world that would *not* be subject to the laws of concepts, reading and critique, strikes Derrida as in some ways a return to a tradition of pure-auto-affection. He responds by placing Nancy back in a history of phenomenology and presence, almost as though deconstruction ought to have remedied or destroyed once and for all the possibility of such a mode of realism. Derrida’s use of voice here is perhaps even more complex than his usual use of free indirect style, for he at once reads alongside Nancy—as though Nancy, too, were aware of a necessary critique of tradition—while also being distanced from Nancy, as though Derrida were situating Nancy within a tradition that deconstruction would (properly) solicit:

the fact remains that the motif of greatest obstinacy, for Nancy and in the name of touch, consists in resisting any idealism or subjectivism, be it transcendental or psychoanalytical. What would drive this whole tradition, no matter how strong and necessary, is the insistence on touch. For Nancy, touch remains the motif of a sort of absolute, irrendentist, and post-deconstructive realism. The spacing of space he exposes to touch remains irreducible to any mathematizable extension and perhaps to any knowledge—an absolute realism, but irreducible to any of the tradition’s realisms. The Thing touches itself, is touched, even where one touches Nothing. Henceforth this is what we shall have to try to understand, as well as how touch and nontouch are *really* touched and self-touching—with infinite tact, into which Nancy’s writing, his exact hyperbole, engulfs, sinks, exhausts, and ex-scribes itself. If one were intent on elaborating these Kantian dealings in a more consequential fashion, one would have to turn to the (metaphysical and transcendental) exposition of the concept of time; one would have to go where time is not only the form of an inner sense, but the “*a priori* formal condition of all appearances whatsoever,” *all* phenomena, be they internal or external. And there, following in the footsteps of Heidegger, among others, we would find again the great question of pure auto-affection, pure “self-touching,” in the movement of temporalization. (Derrida 2005, 46)

Placing Nancy *back* in this tradition of auto-affection, ‘haptocentrism’ and realism repeats other engagements that Derrida had previously undertaken with other ‘fellow’ philosophers. *On Touching* operates on a series of levels, and through a series of voices, but one of its performative modes takes a form of a salutation in which praise and admiration for

Nancy's bold maneuver towards realism is also an act of interpellation: Nancy is at once the bravest of philosophers in his approach towards an absolute realism that would break with all subject-centered idealisms, at the same time as he is nothing more than a repetition of a gesture that Derrida finds repeated throughout the history he surveys. In the relatively early *Writing and Difference* Derrida claimed that philosophy had always been a mode of empiricism, or an attempt to grasp truth as such without mediation. It was this tradition of absolute presence that would be challenged both by Derrida and by Levinas, whom Derrida praises for having refused the project of self-presence, but whom he also criticizes for positing a pure alterity. Derrida was as critical of those philosophers who argued that auto-affection could simply be overcome in a movement of self-loss as he was of the Hegelian project of absolute mastery. In *Writing and Difference* he rejects both Bataille's and Artaud's attempts to destroy the distance and structure of cognition, at the same time as he insists – against, and with, Husserl – that the question of genesis must be sustained. Derrida follows Husserl in steering between the Scylla and Charybdis of simply accepting that the world is given through mediating structure, and continuing a project to account for the emergence of systems.

For Levinas there can be no pure grasp of the world, for the world is always disturbed by an other (a human other) whom I cannot experience (Derrida 1978, 152). In a footnote to his essay on Levinas in *Writing and Difference* Derrida targets a certain tradition of *non-relation, immanence or pure self-coincidence* that he sees in the works of Schelling and Bergson – authors who have subsequently played a key role in displacing deconstruction from its theoretical primacy after Derrida – and whom Derrida sees as disrupted by the Levinasian ethics of the other (Deleuze 1988; Hamilton Grant 2006). One might say that there is an anticipatory self-archiving hinge in this footnote, where Derrida will refuse an inhuman, unthinking, non-relational and self-coinciding immanence, for the thought of a transcendence that will be opened by an other (even if, in this essay on Levinas, Derrida will insist that the other is never wholly other and is always the other *for me*, always subjected to 'lesser violence'):

In his *Exposition of Philosophical Empiricism* Schelling wrote: "This God would be Being enclosed in itself in an absolute manner, would be substance in the most elevated sense, free of every relation. But from the very fact that we consider these determinations as purely immanent, as relating to nothing external, one finds oneself in the necessity of having to conceive them by parting from *Him*, that is, to conceive him as the *prius*, that is the absolute

prius. And it is thus that, pushed to its final consequences empiricism leads us to the supra-empirical.” Naturally, by “enclosed” and “enfolded” one is not to understand finite closure and egoistic muteness, but rather absolute alterity, what Levinas calls the infinite absolved of relation. An analogous movement is outlined in Bergson who, in his *Introduction to Metaphysics*, criticizes the empiricist doctrines unfaithful to pure experience in the name of true empiricism, and concludes: “This true empiricism is the true metaphysics”. (Derrida 1978, 320)

Derrida approvingly opposes Levinas’s intrusion of the other and the face to a tradition that would aim to grasp an *absolute as such without relation*. At least some aspects of Derrida’s work would draw closer to an almost-Levinasian promise that might come from the other, a difference and transcendence that would be radically different from any already constituted system of relations. What Derrida criticizes here is a pure immanence without relation. (Of course today’s post-deconstructive speculative realisms have stressed relations, but these relations are neither the relations humans impose on the world, nor are actual relations exhaustive of all possible relations; beyond relations there would still be the force of the real (Bryant 2011)). Derrida, in criticizing Levinas’s possibility of an ethics of alterity, seems to head off in advance any overcoming of distance and difference, any refusal of mediating conditions that would destroy deconstruction and its critical project. It might well be that, later in *On Touching*, what Derrida took Nancy to be doing (‘absolute realism’) presaged one mode of what would become a counter-deconstructive move. If one were to read *On Touching* after *Writing and Difference* and in line with Derrida’s own accounts of both phenomenology and its critics (such as Foucault) we would distinguish between a deconstruction that stressed the difficulty and distance of *différance* and later appeals to life, affect, realism, history, animality, living labor, events, bodies and so on. We would then oppose Derrida as a *critical* philosopher, always wary of referring to anything like life or the real that might be given as such, to a later series of ‘continuist’ postulations (Derrida 2005 124–25). Derrida’s ‘text’, *écriture*, *différance*, and *gramme* would be strategies that would guard against any attempt to leap outside the differential forces that are evidenced in the context-opening power of concepts. If this were so, and if Derrida were to be read as a primarily critical, post-Kantian, post-phenomenological philosopher concerned with the limits of structures, then one would need to do interpretive work to keep Derrida viable for the more realist present. One could save Derrida either—in the mode that he saved himself—by granting concepts a promissory or sublime

quality, where the concept of justice cannot be exhausted in the here and now and would signal from itself some beyond of all determined and differentiated systems, *or* one could claim that Derrida was talking about natural life all along and that deconstruction might be naturalized by saying that the ‘trace’ could refer to neural processes, or be a form of neo-Darwinism, with genetic inscription being a form of tracing (Roden 2005; Spolsky 2002).

But I suggest that we don’t save Derrida from the speculative realist or absolute realist renegades, and that we don’t accept the value of saving a philosopher by smuggling him back into the heaven of good thinking. Instead we should ask about the archive, the Derridean archive and beyond that the archive as such: what is an archive such that it can be read in a manner that belies the sense it made of itself? Did Derrida’s own modes of self-archiving not produce an anodyne Derrida, one who would be able to be consigned to the dustbin of an all too human attention to writing and concepts? (There have been Derrideans who have charted a path beyond writing and realism, suggesting *not* that writing is a mediation of life, but that whatever could be referred to as life or nature takes the form of a dispersed, uncomprehending, and anarchic open whole; it is not that we cannot know nature *as such* because we always address nature through difference and systems, for there is no nature as such, only potentialities to differ, that are also potentialities for loss, dispersal, destruction and senseless *non-relation* (Kirby 2011; Wilson 1998)).

II. Surviving Deconstruction

With that in mind here are the three concepts that I want to weave together in thinking about Derrida today (with ‘Derrida today’ standing as an instance of what it might be to think a monument, or a material form, that stands beyond its living presence and serves to call us back to a once animating sense):

- a. The Anthropocene
- b. The Archive
- c. Auto-Affection/Hetero-Affection (and Auto-Archiving/Hetero-Archiving)

With regard to the third point, I would suggest that ‘we’ (‘we Derrideans’) have attended to and absorbed the deconstructive maneuver whereby all auto-affection is also necessarily hetero-affection, but have been less attendant to the converse entailment that all hetero-affection is

also auto-affection: all gestures of touch that reach out towards an other in order to lose oneself, or aim to give from and annihilate oneself, also inflate the self. (Consider how an absolute forgiveness of you, regardless of how unforgiveable your actions might be, would be the ultimate act of divine self-elevation for me. Pity, charity, forgiveness: all are ‘virtues’ that can diminish or devour an ‘other,’ and all in the name of a certain ethics. To *touch* an other in order to lose oneself, to aim at pure hetero-affection, might be the supreme act of divine egoism). Considering the violence of *hetero-affection as auto-affection* is important today precisely because we live in an epoch of hyper-haptocentrism (that is also a *hypo*-haptocentrism); we fetishize touch not only as self-presence but also as absolute self loss. The capacity to touch, or the capacity to be involved in relations of affect rather than knowledge, seems to liberate us from the prison of mind and consciousness:

touch is anything but common. Touch reaches toward that which is most uncommon: the will-have-been. Common sense as it is usually understood connotes a consensual politics that decides in advance what are the limits of political qualification. Common sense takes for granted a strict equivalence between bodies and the state. To be qualified politically within the nation-state system is to reside within the iterable bounds of citizenship. In this system, territory and identity are conflated, assuring strict narratives of national identity that frame the grids of qualification that permit us to speak authoritatively about the state as the organization of space and time. Yet, touch exceeds the state, calling forth that which cannot be securely organized. (Manning 2007, xxi)

The promise of touch and affect is that we might relate to an other in a mode of pure alterity or divine hetero-affection; such a reaching out might occur as a relation beyond all system and economy, as though there might be reaching out without return, the attainment of the non-self-conscious gift. We could also perhaps see that when Derrida seemed to reach out and give his thought, time and text to an other (such as the homage to Jean-Luc Nancy’s absolute realism, which he incorporated *back* into phenomenology and ‘haptocentrism’), Derrida was also creating an archive in which he–Derrida–would be one step ahead of the future by remaining critical and vigilant (Cohen 2009). But Derrida’s strategy raises some questions.

First, how is this lapse back possible; how is it that deconstruction yielded this monstrous offspring, this ‘absolute realism’ that Derrida found in an undutiful Nancy? This is not the often-made stupid point that Derrida can’t ask for respectful reading if he himself allows for

anything to be said. It is the more Derridean point that a text cannot control itself, and that if an accident is *possible*—if Nancy *can* emerge from deconstruction—then this is not external to deconstruction but indicates a potentiality. This potentiality is the hetero-archive that was required by Derrida in order to archive himself, a potentiality that goes beyond a rigorously critical Derrida. Let us stay with this term that Derrida seizes upon in Nancy—‘absolute realism’—in which there is touching, or sensing, that is not the touching *of self by self*. Is ‘touching without touch’ a lapse *back* into some Merleau-Pontian ‘flesh’, Husserlian passive synthesis or Deleuzian proximity, *or* is it the unfolding of what Derrida once referred to as trace or play that would not take the form of a concept? For the trace considered as a potential of the movement of concepts can be read as a form of self-touching that achieves a mode of self-elevation. ‘We’ use concepts to communicate among each other, but the same power of concepts that operates within contexts also necessarily breaks from contexts. The potentiality of concepts (such as ‘justice’) would always be more than we might ever actualize, and would extend us beyond ourselves (if concepts were to continue to be re-read, re-animated or haunted by a spirit that could not be exorcised) But the ‘trace’ can be considered both as a movement accountable by way of the (promising) logic or concepts, and as a rogue potential at war with the concept’s movement of sense. In ‘Structure Sign and Play’ Derrida refers to a trace that goes nowhere, promises nothing, and might even—if we think in the manner of a de Man—remain as a dead letter, in which all apparent *promises* would be moral projections that would supplement the letter. This aspect of the trace would open a haunting of another mode, not a haunting of re-animating spirits and voices, but a repetitive, destructive, ‘undead,’ inert, and blind force.

So we might ask: what happened to the other Derrida that Derrida did not archive, the Derrida that did not form part of his own self-touching? We can extrapolate this question to archiving in general: in what ways does the attempt at self-memorialization and self-formation through the creation of one’s future in advance, not also require a hetero-archiving that cannot be mastered? I would suggest that this is the problem of the Anthropocene.

III. The Anthropocene:

The relatively new geological reference to the Anthropocene can be defined as a concept both in the Derridean and Deleuzian-Guattarian

senses (Deleuze and Guattari 1994; Derrida 1977). Concepts do not label a set of already given terms, but operate at the limit of ideality: a concept works only by gesturing to more than any of the instances that it names: ‘when a concept is to be treated as a concept I believe that one has to accept the logic of all or nothing. I always try to do this and I believe that it always has to be done, at any rate, in a theoretical-philosophical discussion of concepts or of things conceptualizable’ (Derrida 1977, 117). For Derrida, a concept possesses a promissory and (I would suggest) inhuman force. I would also suggest that Derrida’s auto-archiving tended towards a diminution of the concept’s capacity to be considered with regard to the anthropocene epoch. The Anthropocene was put forward by geologists to signify that human existence on the planet *will be readable*, after the non-existence of humans (Crutzen and Stoemer 2000). Such a thought operates by looking back to an inhuman time, via the present human capacity to read the earth’s strata in order to intuit pre-human syntheses, or epochs of time sedimented in the planet’s layers. From that capacity to read our own inhuman past, we can imagine an inhuman future that would read our human present. The Anthropocene is a *concept* insofar as it does not signify what is already actualized, but asks us to refer to what *would be* the case; it gathers an extensive set (the earth’s strata) and asks us to think intensively. Even if the Anthropocene turns out not to be an actual truth, given in this concrete world, it nevertheless asks us to think and perceive *as if* our world would be readable in the absence of what we now take to be readers. Indeed, we might say that there is something sublime *and* counter-sublime about the Anthropocene considered as a concept. Strictly speaking we cannot know the world as it will be without us, but we can—from examining the archival traces of an inhuman past—proceed *as if* we could imagine a world that would continue to exist in our absence. It would always require a concrete fragment of this world, *lived as fragment*, to enable us to think beyond the fragment, *not towards some unifying whole, nor to some completion or fulfillment of the present*, but to a time in which a different mode of synthesis, beyond our own, might be possible.

On the one hand, then, the Anthropocene seems to bring deconstructive logic to the fore: there is a tracing or archival force that precedes any command of signifying systems, *and* that would operate in the absence of human life and intentionality. Further, the very forces and inscriptive processes that enable human sense and maintenance will operate beyond that very sense: the conditions for the possibility of human meaning and inscription are also the conditions for meaning’s

destruction and non-survival. It is because there are processes of tracing that we can mark this world as our own, but those same processes will enable a non-human stratification. The very industries (including knowledge) that make this world our own, will hasten the destruction of our world *and* create a scar on the planet that will not be that of our own intentionality or experience.

On the other hand, it is the promissory capacity of the Derridean concept that seems to preclude genuine attention to the potentiality of the Anthropocene: Derrida's concepts, and his claim that deconstruction amounted to justice, granted the concept a specifically ethical mode of futurity:

First name: the *messianic*, or messianicity without messianism. This would be the opening to the future or to the coming of the other *as* advent of justice, but without horizon of expectation and without prophetic prefiguration . . . An invincible desire for justice is linked to this expectation. By definition, it is and should be certain of nothing, through no knowledge, no consciousness, no foreseeability, no program as such . . . This messianicity stripped of everything, as it should be, this faith without dogma that moves forward in the risk of absolute darkness, will not be contained in any received opposition of our tradition, for example the opposition between reason and mysticism. It announces itself everywhere that, reflecting without wavering, a purely rational analysis shows up this paradox, namely that the foundation of the law—the law of the law, the institution of the institution, the origin of the constitution—is a 'performative' event that cannot belong to the set of events that it founds, inaugurates or justifies. Such an event is unjustifiable in the logic of what it will have opened up. It is the decision of the other in the undecidable. (Derrida 1990, 938)

There can be concepts only because the concept intends a sense that exceeds any already given instance; one cannot exhaust the force of a concept by ostensive definitions or actuality. There would always be justice 'to come'. But whereas Derrida's early work on the concept came close to using ethical teleology as a perjorative, his later work tended to forgo attention to the counter-ethical force of concepts.² That is, a concept's capacity to operate beyond the intentionality and actuality of this world of sense and this human-political context could signal future instances of promised justice, but it could *also* signal a rogue, untamed, anarchic, monstrous and dispersing power. The inscription of a text or monument allows it to continue into a future and open up further senses, as yet unimagined, but that same inscriptive process will also yield a senselessness or dead letter. This is what is indicated by the Anthropocene, a certain continuity or future

that is not that of justice or promise (if we take those terms to mean some form of coming *to presence* that nevertheless will always remain unrepresented). Deconstruction enables a radical thought of futurity both as maintenance—a concept’s capacity to intend beyond actual and present contexts—and as destruction; it is possible that the very inhuman matters that enables a concept’s living on will also allow the concept to survive as a dead letter or be destroyed entirely.

This other side of the concept’s force has pertinence today, not just because it allows us to consider the Anthropocene in a manner that allows us to think, in a sublime mode, of the ways in which our history might be read in our absence. When we think about Derrida today, we can either defend the limits of the concept against criticisms made by speculative realism, or what Derrida tried to ward off as Nancy’s absolute realism (a world that senses itself, an affective milieu that is in a mode of self-touching before and beyond critical reading). Or, we can say that Derrida’s own archiving of himself—placing deconstruction as a critical vigilance against absolute realisms, which he would place within a metaphysics of haptocentrism—needs be countered by hetero-archival forces. The power of deconstruction would not remain within the promise of justice, or democracy, forgiveness and friendship to come. All these political concepts are made possible by archival forces that exceed any polity. Accordingly, I would suggest that speculative realism is a symptom, or necessary possibility, and ought to be taken seriously: how is it that Derrida could be consigned to a past of linguistic and textual idealism, how could Nancy have so misplaced himself, how could we have lost the truth of deconstruction? *Are we stupid?* Yes, essentially: we are not masters of ourselves, we are invaded by dead voices; we manufacture more and more detritus to send into the future, but there is no guarantee those messages or monuments will not lie dormant and unread as so much waste. This notion of the dead and unreadable future is as much deconstructive as is the project of the reanimation of a text as sense: both were given in Derrida’s work on Husserl. A sense survives by taking on a material body that will send itself into the future, but such a sense—through the very matter that makes it possible—is also exposed to its own death.

IV. Archive

This brings me to the archive. The epoch of the Anthropocene intensifies the Derridean concept of *mal d’archive*: the Anthropocene strata (that may be readable beyond the existence of human readers) will be possible

because of human maintenance. And one might describe this self-sustaining mode of human existence as feverish: a frantic self-gathering, completed with such force and panic that it destroys itself. The archive and the processes of tracing that allow for the synthesis of the world *as ours* (in writing and technical systems) bear a potentiality to extend beyond the world. Human forces of survival do not merely extend the range of man as organism, but bear a technicity that enables a continuity of sense, an industrial and metaphysical tradition, and an archive of knowledges that enables man to live on. This *extension* not only allows us to imagine the continuation of the archive beyond our own being, where humanity may exist as a scar or trace on a planet no longer blessed with humans, but also opens the thought of the destruction of sense. I would suggest that such a destructive possibility is already being rehearsed and witnessed. Quite literally we are beginning to imagine a world in which readability will exist in the absence of readers. The condition of the dead text is here and now, and this is indeed what deconstruction once promised: the very forces that allow for memory and the continuity of sense are also the forces of death.

Let us never forget this Greek distinction between *mneme* or *anamnesis* on the one hand, and *hypomnema* on the other. The archive is hypomnesis. And let us note in passing a decisive paradox to which we will not have time to return, but which undoubtedly conditions the whole of these remarks: if there is no archive without consignment in an *external place* which assures the possibility of memorization, of repetition, of reproduction, or of reimpression, then we must also remember that repetition itself, the logic of repetition, indeed the repetition compulsion, remains, according to Freud, indissociable from the death drive. And thus from deconstruction. Consequence: right on that which permits and conditions archivization, we will never find anything other than that which exposes to destruction, and in truth menaces with destruction, introducing, *a priori*, forgetfulness and the archiviolithic into the heart of the monument itself. Into the “by hear” itself. The archive always works, and *a priori*, against itself. (Derrida 1998, 11–12)

This potentiality—of an archival force of survival beyond life—is precisely what defines the new epoch of the anthropocene, or stratigraphic tracing beyond humans. But non-living survival also opens a more general thought of the epoch, which we might want to think of in terms of Husserl’s *epoche*: Husserl asks us to imagine the world’s appearing, not the world as it would be for us, bound up with our sense, projects, and assumptions, but just its appearing. In many ways this is what the concept of the anthropocene opens: how might this world (our world) be viewed without humans? First, our traces on the earth would be marks

that there had been some event, but not *what* that event was or meant. All our traces (literary and otherwise) would remain but without human context or concept. The archive would be a dead letter (which is also to say that it would be maximally alive, not reduced to any given context or ethos). The people would be missing, leaving something like a maximal force of dissemination that would also be a maximal force of inertia.

There will be a time when sense is no longer grounded in the context of human intentionality, and that is perhaps when reading might begin. Rather than lament a world in which readers no longer have the history, literacy or grounding to master the tradition, we might start to read ourselves as if we no longer existed, as if we were no longer present to guarantee sense.

What does this mean in terms of the Derridean archive? What would a Derrida of the anthropocene be like, a Derrida lifted from his own milieu of sense, a Derrida who appeared *not* on his own terms, but taken over by the texts' own inscriptive processes? This might be a Derrida lifted from a phenomenological, Levinasian and ethical tradition (Anderson 2012)—a Derrida that we were not trying to save, but that lived on despite our archival efforts (and despite Derrida's own archiving).

V. Auto-Affection/Hetero-Affection

Derrida's entire career could be considered as a mode of self-archiving: take up the voices of the dead, and repeat in order to disclose the deconstruction lying dormant in their texts, and then use this gesture to read into the future. Consider *On Touching* where Nancy—a possible future of deconstruction—is returned to a past read as haptocentric. (But consider also Derrida's reading of Husserl, where phenomenology's break with metaphysics in the suspension of all ground is at once proto-deconstruction and the fulfillment of metaphysics; it is when texts sound Derridean—when texts refuse everything already given, refuse all truth and sense—that they are also once again, modes of metaphysics. Philosophy has always been deconstruction: a refusal to accept any actuality as exemplary, along with an imperative to interrogate genesis). Self-archiving occurs in the deconstructive gesture, which finds its truth in what was already there, but which also finds texts to be unfaithful to their proper deconstructive truth; falling back on received notions and inert inscriptions, requiring the later deconstructive reading to disclose the rogue Husserl. But this should prompt us to ask: how is it that a text deadens itself to its own proper sense, to what it ought to want to say? And then more specifically we might ask: why did Nancy

after deconstruction start to talk about absolute realism? Why go back to self-touching? The 'absolute realism' that Derrida finds in Nancy would allow for a world of self-touching without distance, a self-sensing without the intrusion of the trace, a refusal of the mark that would render any touch of self already an alienation and distance from self.

Now if deconstruction defines itself along these lines, and Derrida grants himself his own milieu, then the proper continuing gesture *would* lie in reading Western thought as a privileging of self-touch, or self-coincidence. Nancy's world that senses itself would be one more gesture of a metaphysics of self-touch that would require a deconstructive critique. If we accept Derrida's touching upon Nancy on Derrida's own terms, deconstruction would necessarily remain critically vigilant against haptocentrism, and would also then be opposed to what, today, presents itself as speculative realism, object oriented ontology, pan-realism and various forms of new materialism or machinic ontology. These would be naiveties or stupidities that would fail to live up to deconstructive rigour. If we accept Derrida's own archive, at least as it is given by Derrida himself in *On Touching*, then there would have been a long history of privileging self-touching, that would culminate in a Nancy who, *after Derrida*, was brave enough to return to a form of global self-sensing that could avert the distance of a necessary and rigorous distance.

We know, from Derrida, that all auto-affection is hetero-affection: the touch of myself that gathers me to myself, the sense of myself that gives me myself as who I am, is always propped upon a series of others (Lawlor 2008). One assembles one's present amidst a terrain of remnants that one can never fully master, and that will always haunt the self from within. If the West establishes itself through a grand corpus of archived letters, that same grand corpus can destroy and fragment its own body; the more that is written and preserved, the greater the expansion of the archive beyond comprehension.

What if Derrida had archived himself differently: rather than reading Nancy as an extension of Husserl, Merleau-Ponty (with concomitant conceptions of flesh and touch), what if Derrida had taken another possible future and inscribed it in another possible past? What if some of Derrida's rogue and inhuman moments, such as the thought of anarchic, untamed and monstrous genesis had not returned Nancy to phenomenology but opened up the thought of errant and counter-ethical forces, those which did not return to place, and which did not create a critical, vigilant and political deconstruction?

Derrideans have, I would suggest, privileged the deconstruction of auto-affection over the no less necessary deconstruction of

hetero-affection. That is, if it is the case that the sense of myself or the touch I direct towards myself is already opened to (and dependent upon) an other, then it follows that the 'I' is not its own. Derrida's self-archiving, or attempts to mark himself, proceeded through a series of others; this necessary polylogue created an open series of potential rogue Derridas. What would *On Touching* have been if it had been written towards Bernard Stiegler, rather than Nancy, and inscribed a counter milieu of deconstructive precursors and inheritors concerned with technicity, systems, inscription, machines and scars? What future Derridas would be opened if the gramme, trace, anarchic genesis, and technicity were the concepts at play? I would suggest that this hetero-archival mode has some urgency today precisely because what confronts us in our current theoretical and popular milieu is a mix of haptocentrism (a world that could touch itself, affect itself, sense itself and feel itself, redeeming itself from the systems of technology that alienate life from itself), and technocentrism, in which something like capacities for inscription and systems of recording, storing and marking are also operating to enclose and embed a new mode of self-presence. Is the risk not only that in forgetting deconstruction we will fall back upon a belief in an affective self-presence, but also that in focusing on the deconstruction of auto-affection, we fail to pay attention to all the ways in which hetero-affection inflates the self?

VI. Finally: Anthropocene as Hetero-Auto-Archiving

At first the capacity to view ourselves as if from a post-human future, seems to diminish the self, creating a sublime distance whereby we annihilate ourselves for the thought of a life and readability to come. The reading of a past that is not ours (or our capacity to touch and reach out to what is not ourselves) seems to open the self to the not-self, to a radically post-human future. But the same gesture of alterity is also auto-archiving and auto-affecting. We now, narcissistically, imagine the tragedy of the post-human future as one in which death and absence will be figured through the unreadability of our own fragments, as though our self-alienation through archive and monument yields some sentiment that we ought to remain as readers of ourselves.

The anthropocene, or thought of a world in which we will be dead, absent and yet readable, has opened up a techno-utopia, in which forces of geo-engineering will claim to save humans for the future to come. Far from being a haptocentrism, in which man might return to himself by way of self-touching, it is technology (and often

in the name of the Anthropocene) that is imagined as a redemptive supplement that will restore and retain human life. This occurs both in projects of geo-engineering, but also fantasmatically in thoughts of genetic enhancement, cognitive enhancement, extended minds and virtual realities. The seeming extension of life into the post-human, the seeming reach out towards the future, is ultimately a form of auto-archival and auto-affective myopia, in which every other becomes ballast for interiority. And, indeed, this much was said by Derrida in his early work on Levinas: without the lesser violence of an incorporation of the other there would be no touch of the other as such. All seeming benevolent and extending hetero-affection ultimately returns the other to the self, just as all apparent hetero-archiving, imagining ourselves as if from elsewhere, is as much narcissistic proto-mourning as it is genuinely open self-eradication.

When we read Derrida today we should explore both the auto-archival and hetero-archival dimensions: that is, we should look at the ways in which Derrida inscribed himself in order to contain many of the rogue potentialities of deconstruction, including those that would help us look beyond conceptual archives to geological archives. Derrida's forms of auto-archiving and auto-affectation passed through a series of others—including Nancy's absolute realism—about whom Derrida should not have the last word (and those others who Derrida archived would include all the other Derridas who he laid to rest). Derrida's gestures of hetero-affection and hetero-archiving were already ways of inscribing a Derrida for today, when another Derrida—a Derrida for tomorrow—might be opened by taking the Derrida archive beyond its own ethos: reading Derrida as if there were no Derrideans, just as we might read humanity as if there were no humans.

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Notes

1. Drawing upon Deleuze and Guattari's use of dates in *A Thousand Plateaus* we could distinguish between extensive labels, such that May 1968 gathers all the events that occurred in a month in a calendar year, while 'May 68' operates intensively to organize a sense that continues through time, and that reconfigures the ways in which we think about dates, history and political memory. The sense of 'May 68' is open to contestation, and every revolution that occurs adds to

and revises this sense. Every proper name is at once extensive—simply labeling the individual who happened to exist—and intensive, drawing together a field of forces and potentials. In *What is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari refer to the ‘conceptual personae’ that attach to concepts: we might draw upon that notion to say that the concept of deconstruction works both extensively to simply gather all the persons and publications that use the label, but that the intensive force of deconstruction also comes with various personae (a post-phenomenological Derrida who turned from nihilism to forgiveness, a dubious de Man who brought the movement into disrepute, and so on).

2. See also: ‘The arche-writing is the origin of morality as of immortality. The nonethical opening of ethics. A violent opening. As in the case of the vulgar concept of writing, the ethical instance of violence must be rigorously suspended in order to repeat the genealogy of morals’ (Derrida 1998, 140).

‘The concept of—or the search for—the context thus seems to suffer at this point from the same theoretical and “interested” uncertainty as the concept of the “ordinary,” from the same metaphysical origins: the ethical and teleological discourse of consciousness’ (Derrida 1977, 17–18).

‘But often while analyzing a certain ethnicity inscribed in language—and this ethnicity is a metaphysics (there is nothing perjorative on defining it as such)—they reproduce, under the guise of describing it in its ideal purity, the given ethical conditions of a *given* ethics. They exclude, ignore, relegate to the margins other conditions no less essential to ethics in general, whether of *this given* ethics or of *another*, or of a law that would not answer to Western concepts of ethics, right, or politics. Such conditions, which may be anethical with respect to any given ethics, are not therefore anti-ethical in general. They can even open or recall the opening of another ethics, another right, another “declaration of rights”, transformation of constitutions, etc.’ (Derrida 1977, 122).